

REFUGEE RESPONSE PLANS

GUIDANCE NOTE - INCLUSION OF SPORT ACTIVITIES

Background:

Sport and play based activities can play an important role in combating some of the challenges of forced displacement by enhancing protection, well-being and social development, and by bringing together refugees with host communities to support peaceful coexistence and reduce the psychological distress of isolation, conflict and loss. For refugee children and youth in particular, sport initiatives can create an environment that supports them to learn and grow, developing amongst other things a stronger awareness of their rights, self-protection mechanisms and opportunities for gaining new skills and building resilience¹.

A sport and play-inclusive refugee response identifies and addresses the opportunities for those who have been forced to flee to engage in protective and developmental sport and play-based activities. It also relies on the analysis of potential barriers that limit refugees access to sport and play based activities and their full enjoyment of the benefits when they participate.² This guidance note outlines important approaches for including sport in Refugee Response Plans (RRPs).

Why Sport and play?

The understanding of the important role that sport and the sport ecosystem can play was reflected into UNHCR doctrine in 2018. The Global Compact of Refugees³ contains substantive references to sport. Paragraph 44 specifically recognises “the important role that sports [...] can play in social development, inclusion, cohesion, and wellbeing for refugee children (both boys and girls), adolescents and youth, as well as older persons and persons with disabilities”. The Compact highlights that new partnerships will be essential to increase access to sporting activities in refugee-hosting areas.

Including organized, well-structured sport and play-based activities in the RRP

Sport- and play-based interventions have the potential to improve protection and development outcomes for refugee communities, particularly children and youth. Recently, sport-based programming has been used as part of education, child protection, and psychosocial well-being programmes – with aims such as increasing school enrolment and retention and ensuring access to services through the appropriate referral pathways. Sport- and play-based activities can also be used to create a safe and inclusive environment where young people (in particular) can build a stronger understanding of their rights and through regular participation rebuild social networks and integrate into new communities. The [Sport for Protection Toolkit](#) provides a framework for sport, development and humanitarian actors, to design and implement protective and developmental sports initiatives for children and youth.

Inclusion and overcoming barriers to participation in Sport

Every UN Member State has an existing sport architecture including National Olympic Committees (NOC's), Football Associations (FA's) and national sporting federations and associations to partner with. Many of these are already, to a greater or lesser degree, delivering sport and play based programming and may have capacity to offer such activities to refugees and the communities that

¹ For example, the evaluation of the relevance and effectiveness of sport programming for refugee inclusion and protection jointly conducted in Mexico and Rwanda by UNHCR and ORF has identified evidence that sport-based activities have contributed to increased protection space for refugee young people and their host communities as part of the broader protection architecture in both countries.

² These barriers operate at multiple levels: structural, sociocultural, inter-personal and personal. Each is also impacted by the specific context, including (for example) whether it is an emergency, a protracted crisis, a resettlement, or returnee situation.

³ [Welcome | The Global Compact on Refugees | Digital platform \(globalcompactrefugees.org\)](#)

host them. However, refugees often experience barriers that limit their opportunities to access sport and to enjoy the full range of benefits that participation can bring. These barriers operate at multiple levels: structural, sociocultural, interpersonal and personal, and are also impacted by the specific context, including whether it is an emergency, a protracted crisis, a resettlement or returnee situation.

How to implement sport-based programming:

The sport for protection approach can be implemented either through stand-alone sport interventions but is more impactful when integrated into existing programmatic areas, including child protection, community-based protection, mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), education and livelihoods.

Each sport or play-based intervention should be adapted and tailored to the specific context, considering the situation and the protection challenges facing individuals or the community. Activities should be designed with an AGD approach and include the meaningful participation of communities. This entails considering how to mitigate social and cultural barriers that may limit participation of vulnerable population groups, including people with disabilities, ethnic and religious minorities, women and LGBTI+ individuals.

Sport and play-based programming will have the best chance for success when implemented through partnerships developed at local level, bringing together actors with complementary skills, knowledge and reach, including sport and non-sport actors such as humanitarian organizations, civil society organizations and rights-holder organizations but also grass-roots organizations and refugee-led organizations, to support sustainability and maximize impact.

As a first step, a preliminary mapping of existing and potential sport partners in the region/country can help understanding the landscape and build the base for identifying strategic partners to move forward with. When identifying which partners to work with on sport-based programming, suggested considerations include:

- What are the operation's key priorities and goals that sport initiatives could contribute to,
- Are there already any existing global frameworks and partnership agreements that could be drawn on to support partnerships at regional/national levels; and
- Are there already sport organizations involved in sport for protection and development activities?

Types of partners

- **National sport organizations** (ex. National Olympic Committees, National Sport Federations/associations) - to embed activities into the local sport structure and bring in the sporting expertise
- **Sport for Development organizations** - to ensure expertise around the design of structured sport for protection/development activities and associated monitoring and evaluation
- **Humanitarian organizations** - to ensure expertise around working in humanitarian settings and understanding of humanitarian coordination mechanisms
- **Rights-holder organizations**- to inform the programming (ex; refugee-led organizations)

To further improve the use of structured sport- and play-based programming in humanitarian contexts and understand how these initiatives can contribute to improved protection and development outcomes, it is central to have in place quality monitoring and evaluations frameworks. In particular, collection of disaggregated data demonstrating how different groups (including girls, young women and persons with disabilities) are able to benefit from sport interventions will be useful to inform future programming.

Resources:

Further guidance can be found in the following:

- *Sport for protection toolkit. Programming with young people in forced displacement settings* ([UNHCR- Sport for protection toolkit](#))*Sport for protection toolkit. Programming with young people in forced displacement settings* ([UNHCR - Sport for protection toolkit](#))
- UNHCR – Sport Partners (<https://www.unhcr.org/pages/4a0d90946.html>)